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ART AND PROGRESS

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F. HOPKINSON SMITH

Art has suffered much from the mistaken idea that artists are as a rule impractical dreamers, gifted to be sure, but lacking in virility and common sense.

No better refutation of this misconception could be found than the life of F. Hopkinson Smith which, in this world, was so lately ended. He was essentially a man among men—a tremendous worker—a practical man of affairs, but he was also a true artist. By profession he was an engineer, and several of the great sea-walls and lighthouses in the neighborhood of New York give token of his efficiency in this line of endeavor. He was one of the most popular writers of fiction of our day, producing in a comparatively short span of years, for he did not begin to write until he was over forty, a very considerable number of books of marked literary quality. He was a painter of unusual ability and charm, producing each summer a large number of water colors

or works in charcoal, done out-of-doors, picturing those places which he habitually visited abroad. But he was first and last an all-around, manly man, a boon companion and devoted friend.

These and other characteristics of this much beloved and many-sided artist were emphasized in an editorial, written with evident intimate knowledge and keen sympathy, published in the *Outlook* of April 21st, from which we venture to quote as follows: "Hopkinson Smith was also a man of the seventeenth century; inspired by the spirit of adventure which set no bounds to human endeavor, but poured itself out with passionate ardor. In his seventy-seventh year he was in the high tide of work, unwearied by years of ardent activity in four different fields, looking forward with unabated interest to the tasks of the future. His death in New York last week ended work which four men might have rejoiced to accomplish. A builder of lighthouses, a charming painter, a novelist of delightful quality, a born story-teller with pen and voice, he ended life as he began, with an unexpended capital of high spirits, generous affections, chivalrous impulses, and that freshness and freedom which are the prime characteristics of genius and turn work into play.

"His versatility misled even his friends; he worked steadily and he worked with resolute intensity. The ease which banished all sense of drudgery from his work was the result of forgotten toil, to recall George Macdonald. He wrote and rewrote his stories with infinite patience. Some of the chapters in that charmingly atmospheric story, "The Fortunes of Oliver Horn," he rewrote fourteen times, and in all fields his energy was not only swift but painstaking. It is one of the consolations of those who loved him that he passed out of life with the unspent ardor of youth, and that at the end he met not age but death, the liberator.

"To Hopkinson Smith life was not a task but an adventure, and he went forth to meet it with a gallantry that welcomed toil and danger because they were the price of achievement. The traditions of ease and dignity of life which he inherited had no power to bind him when he had

to face life on the most practical plane. In the prosperity of the later years it was his delight to remember that he had worked with his hands and carried a dinner-pail; it counted much with him that he had been the comrade of the men who work with their hands. He was an old-fashioned gentleman who had escaped the limitations of his class by companionship with his fellows, but kept intact its sensitive instinct for honor, its chivalrous desire to shield, protect and help those on whom heavy burdens rested. . . .

"The seventeenth-century man must win his way in this age of specialization. When Hopkinson Smith began to write, the writers smiled, not unpleasantly, but they smiled. When he began to paint, the painters smiled. They all liked him, but they did not take him seriously. He was a better painter every year of his life, and made his way to a place of his own by the picturesque charm of his transcriptions of the Thames, the Seine, of Holland, Spain, Venice, Constantinople; and then, two years ago when his friends thought he had reached the end with his brush, he surprised London and captured her elusive appeal to the imagination in a series of vigorous sketches in charcoal.

"When Hopkinson Smith began to write books it was in the shade of the white umbrella, and his writing was incidental to his painting. 'I have preferred,' he said in the introduction to the delightful book of Mexican sketches, 'rather to present what would appeal to the painter and the idler—a land of white sunshine, redolent with flowers; a land of gay costumes, crumbling churches, and old convents; a land of kindly greetings, of extreme courtesy, of open, broad hospitality.' The picturesque aspects of things seen in high light by a man alive to his finger-tips lost none of their charm when they were transferred to the pages which gave the early impressions of a painter whose vitality needed another medium of expression. But those impressions were not mere transcriptions, and their writer was not a passive impressionist. The human element always made an intimate appeal to his heart, and the atmosphere which gave these

studies their charm was charged with personality. It was Madame Laguerre who made a bit of France on the prosaic Bronx. Even in Venice the human story is never interrupted, and palaces 'clear in the limitless light of arched heaven and of circling sea,' or dreaming in the divine moonlight of the city of dreams, were still the homes of men and women."

Less than a fortnight before Hopkinson Smith's death he was planning an exhibition of his paintings to be shown in several cities of Texas during the coming season, looking well ahead and planning with enthusiasm.

This is, as the writer of the *Outlook's* editorial has said, not the time to estimate the value of his contributions either to literature or art, but it may be suggested that as years pass they will be found of greater significance than he at least believed.

KARL BITTER

There was something very shocking in the death by accident of Karl Bitter, the well-known sculptor, which occurred in New York last month. Mr. Bitter was not yet fifty years of age, and despite his already distinguished achievements had not attained the zenith of his power. His abrupt removal from the field of American art must, therefore, be reckoned as a very serious loss.

Mr. Bitter was at the time of his death President of the National Sculpture Society. He was also Director of Sculpture for the Panama-Pacific Exposition. In this capacity he served in two previous expositions, Chicago and St. Louis. The Astor Memorial Gates for Trinity Church, New York, first brought him into prominence. Among his noted works were the Franz Sigel Monument, New York; the Angell Memorial, Ann Arbor; Ogden Memorial, Indianapolis; the Carl Schurz Memorial, New York; and the Jefferson Memorial, University of Virginia.

A Memorial Meeting in honor of this sculptor's attainments and character was held in New York on May 5th.

Numerous reproductions of his work together with a review of his life will be published in the next number of ART AND PROGRESS.